

# Bengtson, Ida

## Ida Albertina Bengtson (1881–1952)

Ida Bengtson, Ph.D., was the first female Ph.D. to be employed as a scientist at the Public Health Service's Hygienic Laboratory, later known as the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Bengtson's parents were Swedish immigrants to Harvard, Nebraska. She graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1903, earning her degree in mathematics and languages. After being employed as a cataloguer at the U.S. Geological Survey library, Dr. Bengtson heeded the advice of a friend and went back to school for an M.S. and Ph.D. in bacteriology—the cutting edge of science at the time—from the University of Chicago.

Hired by Hygienic Laboratory director Dr. George McCoy in 1916, Dr. Bengtson made a breakthrough discovery in 1917, linking an outbreak of tetanus to contaminated vaccine scarifiers. Bengtson had many triumphs other in her career, including proving that an infantile paralysis was caused by a new variety of botulism, *Clostridium botulinum* (type C); aiding the development of the typhus vaccine; and developing the complement fixation test still in use for the detection and differentiation of rickettsial diseases such as endemic and epidemic typhus, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and Q fever. In her research, Dr. Bengtson contracted typhus herself. Internationally recognized for her pioneering work, Dr. Bengtson paved the way for the women scientists at the NIH today.

Dr. Bengtson also is included on our [Early Women Scientists at NIH](#) page.



Ida A. Bengston

## Resources

### Journal Sources:

- Bengtson IA, Topping, NH. [Complete Fixation in Rickettsial Disease](#). Am J Public Health. 1942 Jan;32(1):48-58.
- Bengtson IA. [Complement Fixation in "Q" Fever](#). Exp Biol Med. 1941;46(4):665-8.
- Bengtson IA. [Complement Fixation in Endemic Typhus Fever](#). Public Health Reports (1896-1970). 1941 Mar;56(13):649-661.
- Bengtson IA. [Preliminary Note on a Toxin-Producing Anaerobe Isolated from the Larvæ of Lucilia Cæsar](#). Public Health Reports (1896-1970). 1922 Jan;37(4):164-170
- Bengtson IA. (1945). [Apparent Serological Heterogeneity among Strains of Tsutsugamushi Disease \(Scrub Typhus\)](#). Public Health Reports (1896-1970). 1945 Dec; 60(50):1483-8.

### Available Files

The image files below are in the highest resolution available. To download the files below, right-click and "save as" to save to your desktop.





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**Dr. Bengston in her laboratory.**

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